



COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

May 17, 2021

The Honorable Tom Hucker
The Honorable Gabe Albornoz
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850

President Hucker, Vice President Albornoz and Members of the County Council:

On behalf of the Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the current state of the School Resource Officer (SRO) program. The Commission on Children and Youth is composed of 15 committed volunteer members, including high school students, parents, and youth-serving professionals, who promote the well-being of Montgomery County's children, youth, and families so that all young people may realize their full potential and become contributing, productive adults. This commission year, our priority areas are to:

1. Analyze and review the major components and effectiveness of the SRO training program to strengthen the relationship between youth and Law Enforcement,
2. Create a public initiative that would ensure the existence and awareness of equitable, inclusive, accessible, and supportive infrastructures across all Montgomery County agencies and institutions.

In light of the recent proposal to remove funding from the SRO program, the Commission on Children and Youth seeks to advise new structures that are supportive of students and schools during a crisis, while ensuring public safety. The Commission on Children and Youth recommends that these data points be considered as we reimagine what supportive, safe schools look like through the proposed "community model".

- Data on Law Enforcement interactions with youth with disabilities;
- Data on Law Enforcement interactions with youth of color, particularly African American and Latinx youth;
- Data on Law Enforcement interactions with the LGBTQIA+ youth community;
- Data on Law Enforcement effectiveness in intervening in suicidal behaviors with young people;
- Data on Law Enforcement community and family advocacy efforts;
- Data on Law Enforcement effectiveness in intervening or preventing external school threats;
- Data on the wellbeing needs of students and student access to supportive services

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Based on the collection and analysis of the aforementioned data points, we recommend the following:

CCY's Recommendations

The Commission's analysis shows a need for availability of appropriate resources to respond to crises in schools. These resources should enhance the safety and learning of ALL students and the mental wellness of young people in need; eliminate mistreatment of students on the basis of race, disability, and/or sexual orientation and gender identity; and strengthen the relationship between the Law Enforcement and the entire school community. To that end, we recommend the following:

1. School staff, parent representatives and students should be a part of the development of the crisis response by Law Enforcement via the "[community model](#)"
2. Law Enforcement officers should be introduced to and trained in school environments to provide youth with a shared understanding about the role of Law Enforcement in the school and in the community. Officers must also understand the developmental and cultural needs of all students, but in particular students of color, as well as students with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ youth. This training should be facilitated by someone with knowledge in cultural competency and special education.
3. Law Enforcement officer's role is delineated from the role of the school administrator specifying that school administrators and teachers are responsible for student discipline and that the Law Enforcement Officers would serve in a support role when there are potential *significant* safety concerns or violations of the law
4. School principals should be accountable for clear guidelines in reporting incidents involving Law Enforcement and making them available for review upon request.
5. Policies and further allocation of resources to ensure that mental health professionals are available to respond to mental health crises rather than relying on Law Enforcement as first responders in these instances.
6. Increase of supports to review the data around well-being needs of students, and in equal turn ensuring the accessibility and coordination of access to resources, developmentally appropriate supports for mental/physical/social-emotional health, supportive/positive relationships, and access to engaging activities/work to ensure that all youth and families are supported towards thriving.

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CCY's Rationale

1. It does not appear that students with disabilities and their families were represented in the Board of Education decision-making process regarding SROs.
2. At the Commission's Annual Youth Having a Voice Roundtable, held on February 23, 2021, students report either having no interaction with their SRO or SROs positively engaging in both the local and school community, but expressed mixed opinions on the removal of the SRO program.
3. The response of Law Enforcement along with other mental health professionals may minimize harm during times of crisis.
4. There is evidence some school principals and staff feel the SRO program/Law Enforcement plays a positive role on the safety of schools and provides mentorships to students.

Summary of the CCY's Position

The Commission is in support of the examination of ways to involve Law Enforcement in support of youth in schools during times of crisis, while also strengthening the identification, accessibility and coordination of well-being supports for youth. We recognize the County Council is currently working on reimagining school safety and student well-being and it is our hope that our recommendations be considered.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration as you address this very important issue to enhance the safety and learning of ALL students in our County. We look forward to systems that are reflective of the expressed interests and needs of Montgomery County's children and youth.

Sincerely,



Renae McPherson, Chair

c: Marc Elrich, County Executive